

From the Stamp Specialist: Trans-Atlantic Mails

By Major F. W. Staff

(From *The Stamp Specialist Emerald Book*, published in 1946,
with images added)

By the Act of Queen Anne 1710, the rate of postage for a single letter from London to New York was settled at 1/- the 1/2 ounce (2/- double and so on) and the prevailing inland rates were added in the case of letters posted beyond London. This was the first official Post Office rate between England and North America.



Entire dated "London February 11 : 1764" to New York via Falmouth and prepaid 5 Shillings ("P5N") for a packet not exceeding 2-1/2 ounces. Endorsed "p Pitt Pacq / Capt. Goddard". The Pitt was a Falmouth - New York packet which entered service in 1761 under Captain Norris Goddard.



Entire letter from Philadelphia to Liverpool carried by private ship to Lisbon, where it was put aboard the Mail Packet to Falmouth, then from Falmouth to the London P.O. Foreign Office where it was rated at the 1 shilling 6 pence Lisbon Packet Rate, which included carriage from Falmouth to London. At the London P.O. Inland Office the Inland Postage to Liverpool (4d) was added, making a total due of 1s 10d. (Rates according to the Act of 9 Anne c10.)



1760 folded cover addressed to Davenport & Wentworth in Portsmouth, "New England", sent via Falmouth, England, by New York Packet, with "NEW/YORK" brownish two-line handstamp (above "Davenport"), red manuscript "PIN" (below "Wentworth") prepaid 1sh packet rate, manuscript "5.8 dwt" rate (N.Y. to Portsmouth), also with sender's routing "p. Pacquet 23 Aug. 60" (lower left). Bishop's mark on back (folded open here) reads "23/AV" (Aug. 23)

in the British North American colonies until about the year 1785, and was still in use in what came to be known as the United States, up to 1792. A survival of this currency is found today in the colloquial expression "two bits" meaning 25 cents.

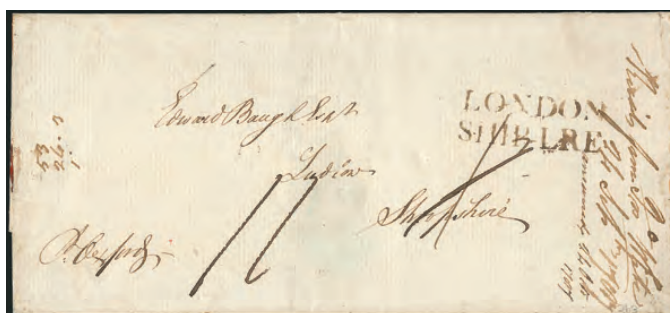
Letters carried by the official Post Office Packet went via Falmouth, which had long since been established as the Post Office Packet port; let-

On letters from America (see page 1) a similar arrangement was in force, and letters of this period show the internal American postage in pennyweights and grains, colonial currency at this time being based on the Spanish silver dollar. This rating was in use



Folded letter datelined "Norwich 3d April 1787" to Alexandria, Va., with sender's routing "By New York Packet, postpaid to New York" (lower left), red "SO NORWICH" straightline handstamp, brownish "POST/PAID" in circle handstamp, matching "4/AP" (Apr. 4) Bishop's mark on back (not shown), red "P 1N5" prepaid 1s packet rate (manuscript, upper right) and 5p internal British postage, "3.8" rate from New York to Virginia (3dwt8gr, in ink, upper right)

ters brought by private ship were taken to the Ship Letter Office of its place of arrival where they were charged the current inland postage and one penny for each letter was paid to the Master of the ship or to the “bringer” of the letters, for his trouble.



1787 folded cover to Shropshire, England, with a “LONDON/SHIP LRE” two-line handstamp, also endorsed “pr Oxford” (lower left), which was a transatlantic trading vessel, thus indicating this cover had a North American origin. Cover shows a manuscript “6” rate crossed out (below ...SHIP”) and re-rated “11” (center) for double weight.

Commencing March 1788 the Packet Boats which plied between Falmouth and New York put in at Halifax, N. S., on both the inward and outward trips.

During the period of the Napoleonic Wars letters from the United Kingdom to America all show very high rates and I have been unable to find any tariff showing the scale of postage; letters in my collection and others which I have seen—all dated between 1797 and 1805 show paid postage of 3/4d 5/- and 6/8d and similar high rates. During these years, Falmouth was still the Post Office Packet port, and many a Falmouth Packet boat made a name for itself on the High Seas, for the Packets were armed and were frequently in combat with enemy Privateers, and sometimes brought home a Prize as well as the mail. I’ve noticed Falmouth Packet mail is usually endorsed simply “per Packet,” though occasionally the name of the ship is given; when this is the case, its history is worth while looking up.

Following the war of 1812 trade between the United States and Great Britain was somewhat stagnant, and due to the Napoleonic Wars when Britain was for many years at war with France, she lost bit by bit what little supremacy we held of the Atlantic Crossing. So that in 1816 enter-

prising American merchants founded the famous Black Ball Line, and later in 1821 the Red Star Line, followed by John Griswold's London Line, and Grinnell, Mintern & Co's. London Line in 1823. E. K. Collins (later of Collins Line fame) founded the Dramatic Line in 1836; the same year also saw the start of the well known Swallowtail Line.

Top to bottom: folded cover to London, England, from Philadelphia, carried on the Black Ball line; with "Forwarded through/Hale's/Foreign

Letter Office,/New-York" four-line red handstamp, also with black De Forest & Co. New York forwarder's oval backstamp.

Cover from Liverpool to Richmond, Va., carried on the Liverpool Red Star Line's St. Andrew; with "1-1/4 Oz. 95-3/4" ship letter rate (top right), red "New-York Ship Mar. 7" circular datestamp and due markings for five times the 18-3/4¢ postage and 2¢ ship captain's fee.

Entire letter from Dungiven, Ireland, to "Hoppers Mills Post Office, State of Illinois", carried on the Dramatic Line ship "Garrick"; with Great Britain 1841 2d strip of four—with the "POSTAGE" inscription clipped from the top of each stamp—departing Liverpool on December 13th, 1843, arriving at New York on January 21st 1844, marked at 27¢ postage due (manuscript, below 2nd stamp from right) to pay the 2¢ incoming ship fee and 25¢ postage from New York to Illinois.

The ships of these lines were all Sail and commanded by very able captains—the very pick of their profession; many had seen service in the war of 1812 and they established



for themselves and their owners a very high reputation. I have had many letters from many parts of England bearing names of some of the ships of these American Packet Lines. In most cases no English postal markings appear, either handstruck or manuscript, for it was the usual practise for merchants to hand their letters in to the Agents of these American firms who sent them off on the first boat. Upon arrival at the American port they went to the Ship Letter Office where they were marked "Ship," and the American Ship Letter Rate of 2 cents was added to what American postage was rated in the case of a letter destined to a town beyond the port of arrival or 6 cents if the letter was to an address in the port of arrival (see bottom cover, page 4).

These early American Packet boats (the British G. P. O. styled them "transient vessels") which made all letters carried by them from the U.S. to the United Kingdom, liable to the British Ship Letter rate of 8d, on top of what postage had already been paid in the States) were in the early years of 1816 and 1820 of about 400 to 500 tons burthen, but by the 1840s were being built to a burthen of 1200 and 1400 tons. In the 1830s and 40s the average time taken by these ships for the voyage outward to England was 20 days, and 35 for the homeward run.

During these years the American Packet boats were undoubtedly the most popular—they were cheaper than the English Packets, where passengers and freight were concerned, and also, by the system already described, which became the usual practice, English merchants saved themselves the Ocean postage of 1/- per letter, by leaving their mail at the Agent's Office, or having it handled by a "Forwarding Agent."

Moreover they did the crossing not only in quicker time than the Post Office Packet, but more frequently, and in the case of the Halifax Packet which was scheduled to sail once a month Canadian merchants found it more expedient to send their mail by private hand and "forwarded" by one of these American Packets. By doing so they avoided the very high internal Canadian postage to Halifax (see page 6).

About this time steamships made their appearance and with the successful crossing of the Atlantic in 1833 by the Canadian built "Royal William," (page 7) much attention was paid to the possibility of regular Atlantic crossings by steamship. This resulted in the organizing of the British and American Steam Navigation Company which subsequently owned three very fine ships "The British Queen," "The President" and "The Sirius" (page 7).

About the same time a very famous ship made its appearance. This was the "Great Western" of Bristol owned by the Great Western Steamship Company (page 7 & 8). The ship made its first voyage in 1838 and amazed the people of both continents by making



July 14, 1845 folded letter forwarded by Harnden & Co. No. 6 Cook St. Liverpool, with oval handstamp with steamship illustration, from Milan, Italy, to Newark N.J., with blue manuscript "Paid to New York by Harnden & Co. of Liverpool" and ship designation "Per Great Western or 1st Steamer".



Folded letter to Auburn N.Y., carried on the last trip of the President, with "P President 10th Feby 1841" (lower left), red "Paid Ship Letter London 9 FE 9 1841" Crown oval date stamp (lower right), Paid tombstone datestamp (center right), red "New-York Ship Mar. 2" datestamp (left of center), and manuscript "Triple \$1.33-1/4" (top right). The cover, which was forwarded to the Dead Letter Office and then to Richmond, Va., also shows red Auburn and DLO date stamps (left edge). It was carried on the President privately to New York where it entered the mails as a ship letter. This was the last trip of the President before it became the first steamer lost on the Atlantic.



The Royal William, on
Canada Sc. 204



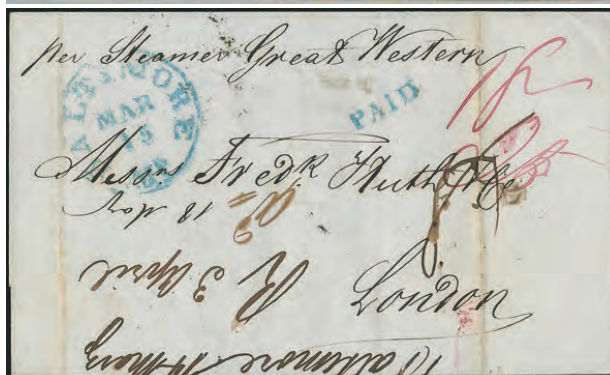
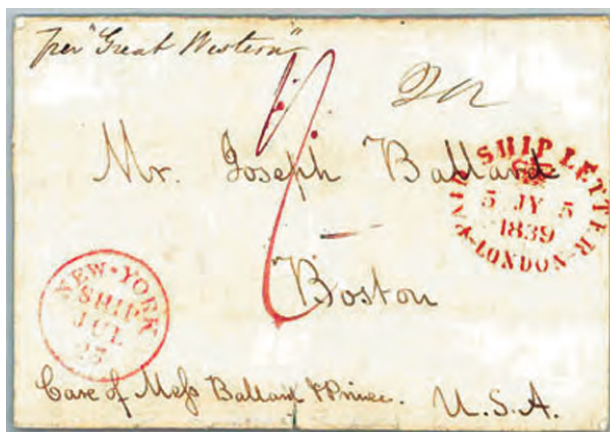
Steamer Sirius



The Great Western
crested an Atlantic
wave, on Great Brit-
ain Sc. 2207

Two Great Western cov-
ers:

Top, to Boston carried
from London, July 5,
1839, to New York, July
23, "per Great Western";
Bottom, a Freight Money
Letter with "per Steam-
er Great Western", blue
"Baltimore Md. Mar.
15" circular datestamp,
matching "Paid" with
magentas manuscript
"18-3/4" rate and "25"



freight money charge (top right) on folded cover to London, England,
also with manuscript "8" pence ship letter due and "1 AP 43/Liver-
pool/Ship" framed datestamp on back.

the crossing in 15 days. All these ships, being privately
owned, carried mail at the Ship Letter rate of 8d the 1/2
oz. across the ocean. (Our own "Savannah" is also credited
as being the first steamship to cross the Atlantic).

Such was the state of things, which, after some con-
siderable time, "woke up" the G.P.O. and after much
prompting from high quarters in Canada caused them to
invite tenders for a mail carrying contract between Eng-

land and British North America. This resulted in Samuel Cunard's famous contract whereby he undertook to carry mails (with heavy penalties for any delay in sailing or even slight infringement of the contract) twice every month from Liverpool to Halifax, and twice every month from Halifax to Liverpool, also to convey the mails twice every calendar month to Boston from Halifax, and to Halifax from Boston and when the St. Lawrence was unobstructed by ice, from Pictou in Nova Scotia to Quebec, and from Quebec to Pictou "by good and substantial steam vessels provided with engines of not less than one hundred and fifty horses power." Not less than four large steamboats for the Atlantic Crossing were to be kept always seaworthy and in complete repair.

On July 4th 1840 the British and North American Royal Mail Steam Packet Company (later called more popularly the Cunard Line) began its famous service with four Steam

A cover from New York to London via Boston. The cover was carried privately by Harnden's Express to Boston where the large red Jun 25, 1840 "FORWARDED BY HARNDENS EXPRESS FROM BOSTON" was applied (upper right), the cover also with "Bristol Ship Letter" handstamp. Upon arrival in Liverpool the Penny Black was affixed



and cancelled to pay for forwarding to London. Harnden's forwarding service to Europe began with the start of the Cunard Steamship service into and out of Boston. However, not to delay this letter it was routed on the steamer Great Western owned by the Great Western Steamship Company.

vessels the “Britannia,” “Arcadia,” “Caledonia” and “Colombia.” Boston became a thriving prosperous city, and the Cunard ships became a symbol of efficiency and reliability and were without any doubt the finest ships afloat anywhere in the world. Britain began to regain the supremacy of the Atlantic and by the 1850s the little American Packets disappeared or were turned over to other duties of lesser importance; whilst Samuel Cunard added to his fleet, each new Liner being an improvement on the last.

The United States Government in the meantime, alarmed at the loss of mail-carrying by American ships, were furthermore extremely annoyed by the British Acts of 1815 and 1837 whereby “transient ships” which implied any Ship not a British Packet, had its mail assessed by the G.P.O. an additional 8d—the British Ship Letter rate, and when by reason of the U.S. Postal Act of 1845 which subsidized American Steam Packet services and established new U.S. cheap rates, the British Treasury (under which the G.P.O. was at that time) continued to inflict this additional ash sea postage, the American Postmaster General terminated existing arrangements between the two countries for the transit of British mail through the U.S. to British North America and ordinary mail transit between the U.S. and B.N.A.

This resulted in “retaliation” between the post offices of the two countries, and mail dated during the year 1848 from England to the U.S. will be found to bear hand-struck postage due markings put on by the America Post Office.



A Retaliatory Rate cover with a large “24” hand-stamp, showing a “Belfast Ju 22, 1848” hand-stamp, carried on the Caledonia to New York via Liverpool (on the first westbound Retaliatory Rate voyage).

Consequently, after much bitter haranguing (the Americans found the British very difficult and stubborn) an arrangement was made—the outcome of the U.S. Reprisal Act of 1848, which imposed extra charges by the U.S. Post Office on the British Mails) whereby Exchange Officers of both countries were established in the principal Transatlantic Ports to arrange the equitable division of the total postage between the two countries according to nationality of the ship carrying the letters.

On mail carried by British Packet to the U.S. the American Post Office received 5 cents of the one shilling postage paid. Special handstruck stamps of varying design were employed at the Ports, a typical



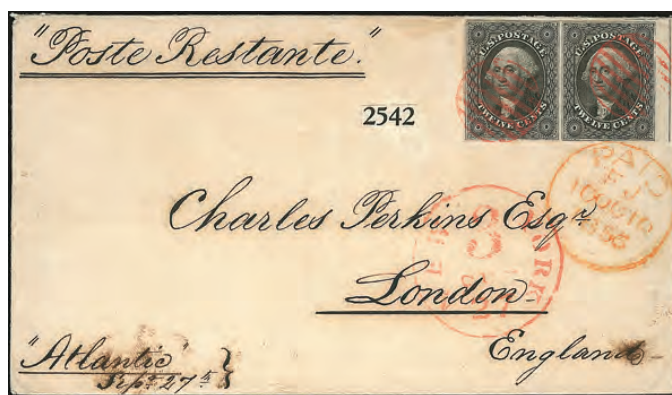
First Eastbound trip with Restored Rate, a folded letter to The Hague datelined New York, Jan. 10, 1849, "p Steamer Europa", with no U.S. postal markings, with manuscript "1/8" restored rate and "120" due; also with "America/Liverpool/JA 22/1849" receiver and red Rotterdam transit backstamp.



First Westbound U.S.-G.B. Treaty Sailing, a February 8, 1849, folded letter from New Ross, Ireland, to New York City, backstamped with green and red date stamps and "Returned for Postage", the front showing a manuscript "1" shilling rate (lower left), large "3" handstamp (upper right), original directive crossed out and re-routed "By Contract Packet" (across the top) and "24" handstamp (top center) applied on arrival for U.S. packet postage. Carried on the Ocean Line's Washington on its February 20, 1849 westbound voyage.

example being the circular Br. Packet Boston 24, struck in red on paid mail, and in black on unpaid; the 24 cents being the equivalent of 1/- sterling; another stamp was applied with it by the Exchange officer:—"5 cents" denoting the U.S. share. In the case of overweight letters, these rates of course changed accordingly. On mail carried by American Packet the same type of marking was put on, but worded e.g. New York Am Pkt 24, together with an additional mark "21 cents." In this case, the U.S. Post Office collected 21 cents out of the total postage of 24 cts and the British share was 3 cents, representing the British inland postage (see also bottom cover, page 10).

In 1845 the United States endeavoured to regain its lost supremacy and an enterprising American citizen Mr. E. K. Collins, the same who founded the "Dramatic Line" in 1836, received a subsidy from the U. S. Government to enable him to start a Line of Packet boats between New York and Liverpool. In 1850 he launched four very fine steamships, and this Line became known as the "Collins Line." These ships were the last word in comfort, elegance, and luxury-they even had steamheating and electric bell service! The first was the "Atlantic," followed later by the "Baltic," the "Pacific" and the "Arctic." The Mail rate was 24 cents per 1/2 oz letter, and due to the subsidy, the freight rates were lower than the Cu-nard. The Cu-nard Line was firmly established however and due to its fine service and reliability was able to stand up to its young and able competitor although it lost the time record for the Atlantic



An 1856 cover to London, England, carried on the Collins Line "Atlantic" (bottom left) with a pair of the U.S. 12¢ black (Sc. 17) tied by red grids and matching "New York 3 Sep. 27" circular datestamp, also just touched by a London "Paid" receiving datestamp.

crossing, for these Collins Liners were also very fast, being especially constructed for speed. They did the crossing in an average of 9 to 10 days against the Cunards steady 11 days. The competition between the two Lines aroused an extraordinary interest on both sides of the ocean; typical of this interest is the doggerel which appeared in “Punch”:

*A steamer of the Collins Line
A Yankee Doodle Notion
Has also quickest cut the brine
Across the Atlantic Ocean
And British agents, no way slow
Her merits to discover
Have been and bought her— just to tow
The Cunard Packets over...*

The Cunard launched new ships also designed for speed, one of them the “Asia” an extremely beautiful vessel, actually regained the speed record from the fastest Collins Liner at one time, but lost it again soon after. However, the Collins Line took risks, their Captains—all fine experienced



A strip of three and two singles of the Canada 1853 Beaver (Sc. 4) tied by concentric ring cancels on a blue folded letter from Quebec City to England with “Steam-Boat-Letter-Quebec SP 17 1853” rimless circular datestamp, “More-To-Pay” straightline handstamp, and large “1” due handstamp, also with a London October 2 backstamp. This letter was carried on the Cunard Lines Asia from New York City on September 21.

men sailed from port in all sorts of weather, whereas the Cunard would “wait awhile,” and put safety first. The Collins Line lost two of their ships, the “Pacific” and the “Arctic,” and running as they were at “cut prices” against the Cunard Line, in spite of their subsidy, were losing

financially so that in 1858 the Line failed. The Cunard in consequence became even more supreme and although other competitive Lines came into being—the Allan Line, Inman Line, and the various U.S., German transatlantic Lines, the competition was healthy so that the Cunard Co. became one of the most important Steamship Lines in the world.

In 1852 the Canadian Government voted a subsidy for a Canadian Transatlantic Service and after an unsatisfactory contract with the Canadian Steam Navigation Co., eventually made arrangements 'with Hugh Allan, (later Sir Hugh Allan) whose family had been sailing ships across the Atlantic since 1822. So, in 1853 the Montreal Ocean Steamship Company made its appearance, and became generally known as the Allan Line. The Canadian Government, with Mr. Allan, tried hard though unsuccessfully to obtain a mail-carrying contract with the British Government. They considered quite naturally that the Mother



A Canada 1859 Queen Victoria 1¢ rose vertical strip of three (Sc. 14), used with 5¢ Beaver (Sc. 15) horizontal pair, all tied by matching strikes of circular grid on a cover to Ireland, with matching "Toronto CW, NO 18 '67" origin c.d.s. and "Paid Derry, Col Packet, DE 5 '67" transit, carried on the Allan Line's Hibernian leaving Quebec City November 23 and arriving at Londonderry on December 4.

country would give some sort of preferential treatment to their young and energetic colony, and offered to carry the mail at lower rates than that of Cunard. But the British Government not only refused to give a contract for the carrying of mail between the U.K. and Canada, they actually put every difficulty in the way, and when the Line was finally started in 1855 the British G.P.O. took the extraordinary attitude of terming these Canadian Packet boats American

vessels, although they sailed under the British flag! The Allan Line made Portland (Maine) their terminal port, and used the St. Lawrence ports of Quebec and Montreal during the summer months when the River St. Lawrence was open.

Letters carried by Allan Line steamers between Canada and Great Britain will often be found stamped with a small circular dated stamp in red “PAID COL PACKET DERRY” whilst mail reaching Glasgow received a marking in black “GLASGOW COL PACKET” in two lines, and at Liverpool a similar red circular stamp to that used at Londonderry was employed. Thus it would appear the British acknowledged the mail from Canada as “Colonial” (assuming the abbreviation COL to denote “colonial”) and preferred to apply the American designation to the Allan Ships on mail destined to a U.S. Port. This was doubtless to safeguard the Cunard interests.



A cover to Scotland with a Canada 1857, 7-1/2p (Sc. 9) tied by “21” in four-ring target, the cover also with a “Montreal L.C. AU 27 1858” part double-circle datestamp, a red two-line “BY-CANADIAN PACKET”, a red “PKT. LETTER PAID LIVERPOOL” tombstone handstamp and manuscript “pr Canadian line” at top.



A “Colonial” Packet cover to Scotland with a Canada 1859, 12-1/2¢ pair (Sc. 18) tied by targets, also with a Woodstock 1860 double-circle datestamp on cover to Scotland, also with a red “Paid Liverpool Col. Packet” datestamp, this being a scarce double Canadian Packet rate cover.

During the 1860s the Allan Line carried the bulk of the Canadian Mail between Canada and Great Britain via the St. Lawrence Route at a 6d rate but in consequence of the G.P.O. calling these ships American vessels, Allan Line mail from the U. K. to Canada via the United States, paid the American Postage, which was the old rate of 24 cents (1/-s), this rate took the letter to Portland only, so that by the time it reached its Canadian destination the recipient had to pay 1/4d Currency, for an extra 2d sterling was imposed on a letter addressed beyond the terminal port, 1/2d sterling equalling 1/4d Canadian currency. This was twice as much as the Cunard rate which in 1854 had been reduced to 8d.

It will seem strange to anyone reading this why the British Government behaved in this way towards this Canadian venture, but it must be borne in mind that undoubtedly the G.P.O. was standing by the Cunard Line, which had faithfully carried out its contract to the full, and had besides built up a splendid British reputation. Moreover the Cunard had suffered only one loss—the “Colombia” in 1843—and that without loss of life, whereas not the same could be said of any other steamship line of those times. Another strong argument was that a Canadian service would have proved detrimental to Great Britain by withdrawing a large part of the revenue accruing to the British P.O. through the Cunard Line, which after all had been specifically put into operation and subsidized to improve services to British North America.

The Allan Line started out in fine style with fine ships, but their captains took great risks due principally to the penalties liable to be incurred through any delay in the delivery of mails under the terms of the contract with the Canadian Government, and ship after ship was wrecked and lost at sea, frequently with a great loss of life. Eventually public opinion in Canada demanded an enquiry into the management of the Line for the people were appalled at such great losses, no other Line having sustained such a high casualty list, so that by the 1870s the Line was reorganized, and began to establish for itself a reputation

along with the several other transatlantic Shipping Companies which, by this time were all sharing in the mail carrying across the Atlantic.

It certainly played a highly important role in the development of Transatlantic postal Services. Although confronted with every sort of difficulty as well as political hindrances with the mother country, the Line went ahead and was able to maintain a 6d postal rate between Canada and Great Britain. Largely due to its enterprise—together with the endeavour of other rival companies, particularly the Inman Line and the White Star Line it helped change completely a situation where the Cunard Line was more or less supreme.

In attempting to give the various rates of postage for mail carried across the Atlantic throughout these years, I am aware I leave myself open to criticism and correction for I do so with the knowledge derived only from my own collection and from the study of some hundreds of covers—through discussion with other interested collectors and with the help of a few books relating to the history of these early Steamship Lines.

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The Postal markings selected for the purpose of illustrating this article (pages 17-18) are by no means complete but they are all typical examples and those most commonly found to have been in use.

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Examples of Postmarks Applied at Liverpool on Cunard Mail



1841 and similar types.



The 1850s. Other similar types are known. Paid markings in red, unpaid in black.



Packet Postmarks applied at American Ports (many varieties and types). These were in use from 1849 onwards during the 1/— (24c) postage rate.



Typical Rate markings applied by Exchange Officers, found always in conjunction with other circular postmarks.



"Debit and Credit" Markings found during the 1860's.



Applied in black in France to show "8 decimes" (about 15c) due.



The 1/— postage 'stamp' 1840s and '50s. Struck at Liverpool. in red on paid mail, in black on unpaid. (Several varieties)



Applied to unpaid Canadian mail from U. K. rated at 3/4d sterling (other varieties also).

8^d Stg.

Seen on Canadian unpaid mail to U. K. (1854— Cunard mail)

7 1/2 Cy

Seen on Allan Line mail to Canada unpaid at the 6d. rate.



Seen on Collins Line Mail (1850-1858). Used for other U. S. Lines up to the 1890s.

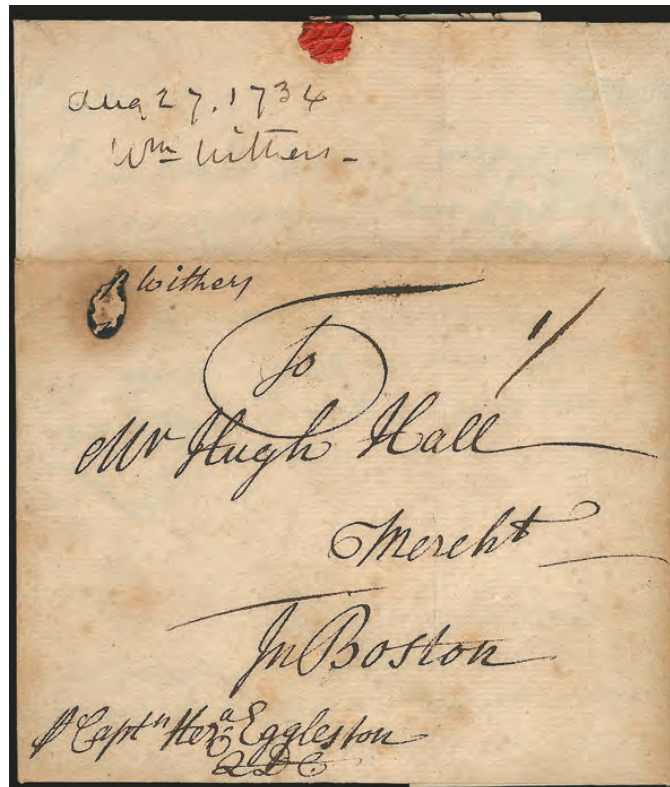


Markings associated with the Allan and other lines. (In U. S. marked "American Packet"; In U. K. marked COLonila Packet)

Summary:

With the Act of Queen Anne 1710, which became effective on June 1, 1711 we find the first mention of any transatlantic rates.

1710:—Act of 9 Anne Cap. X: From or to London and New York 1/- the 1/2 oz. or a single letter, 2/- double and so on. (British Internal Postage to London added).



A folded letter to Boston datelined "London Augt. 27th 1734", endorsed "Pr. Capt. Eggleston" with "1/" for the 1 shilling rate for 1/2 ounce.

1765:—Act of 5 Geo. III Cap. XXV: Re-affirmed the Packet rate of 1/- to and from London to any North American Port—revised the inland rates in America. Basic rate of "4d for every single letter from any port in the British Dominion in America to any other Port within the said Dominion."

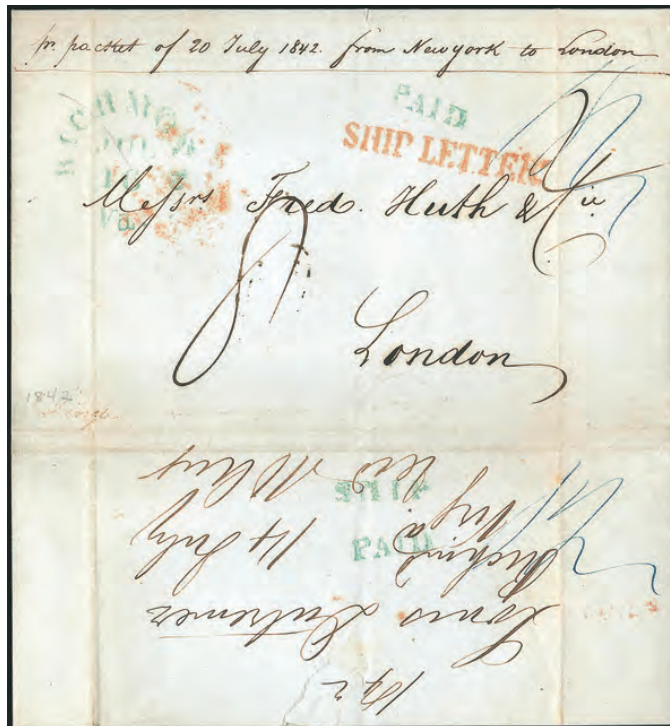
1797-1810:—(Approximately) Excessively high rates—from 3/4d per 1/2 oz. upwards. (Seen on covers London to U. S. Ports).

1815:—Act of 55 Geo. III. This act imposed a ship letter rate of 8d on letters from “any of the Kingdoms and Places beyond the Seas,” on mail carried in ships other than British Packets. (The ship letter rate was 6d in 1814 and 4d in 1799).

1815:—The First American Packet Line, The Black Ball Line. American Ship Letter rate 6 cents applied on arrival at an American port to letters addressed to Port of arrival. Ship Letter rate of 2 cents in addition to U.S. Internal postage on letters beyond port of arrival. British Ship Letter rate of 8d applied on mail arriving in Great Britain.

1837:—A British Treasury Act fixed a sea postage rate of 8d on all mail from and to the U.K. other than that carried by the official Post Office Packets (Falmouth Packets); the 1815 Act rated only incoming letters at 8d.

Folded letter from Richmond Va., with green “Richmond Va. Jul. 16” (1842) circular datestamp, matching “Paid” and blue manuscript “18-3/4” rate, sender’s routing “pr packet of 20 July 1842 from New York to London”, red “Ship Letter” straightline handstamp and manuscript “8”, also backstamped Aug. 10, green “Ship”, “Paid”, manuscript “12-1/2” rate (applied in Richmond).

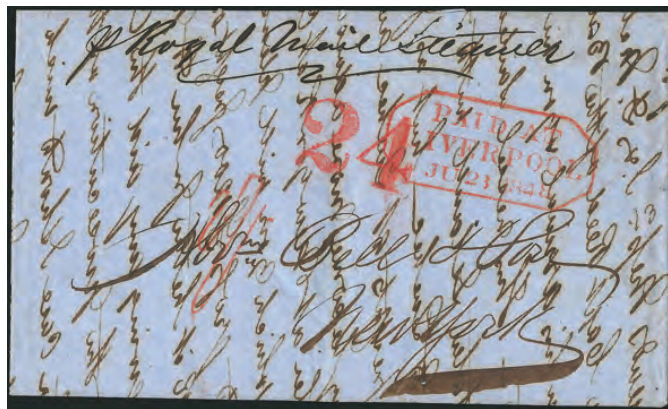


1838:—The launching of the “Great Western”—principal mail carrier of its time. Ocean postage 8d to and from the U.K.

1840:—Samuel Cunard’s Contract. July 4, 1840:—1/- per 1/2 oz. to and from U. K. to Halifax and Boston—the

terminal ports; in 1847 the service was extended to New York. On letters to Canada an additional 2d sterling on letters addressed beyond Halifax (1/4d Canadian Currency) in all. On letters via Halifax to a U. S. destination the U. S. charged internal postal rates from Canadian border town to U. S. destination.

1848:—The U.S. Reprisal Act, June 27, 1848. The United States assessed English mail an additional 24 cents in retaliation for the British practise of charging 8d on all mail arriving in the U.K. and carried by other than British Packet.



Red "Paid at/Liverpool/JU 23 1849" octagonal datestamp and matching "1/" rate handstamp on 1848 blue folded letter to New York City, also with red "24" retaliatory rate handstamp applied at New York, with content showing through. The cover was carried on the Cunarder Caledonia and arrived at New York on July 8, making this the first westbound mail subjected to the new U.S. retaliatory rate.

1849:—A Treaty between the British and U.S. Post Offices went into effect February, 1849, as a result of the U.S. Reprisal Act. The basic rate of 24 cents (1/- sterling) per 1/2 oz. was accepted by both parties and exchange offices established at the ports to mark all mail with a share of the total postage according to the nationality of the ship which carried it. The Postage on a 24 cents or 1/- letter was made up as:

U. S. Inland Postage:05
Sea Postage to Country owning the Packet:16
British Inland Postage:	<u>.03</u>
	.24 cts.

1850:—May 1850. The Collins Line. United States carry mail in their subsidized Packets at 24 cents, the same as the Cunard Line.

1854:—The British Packet rates reduced to 8d sterling per 1/2 oz. (10d Currency) between Great Britain and Canada via New York and to 6d sterling (7-1/2 Currency) via Halifax or Quebec.

1855:—The Allan Line. Mail carried by Canadian Packet to and from the U. K. rated at 6d sterling (7-1/2 Currency).



Cover to Ware, England with 7-1/2d rate paid by New Brunswick two 1851 3p dark red (Sc. 1a) and a diagonal bisect (Sc. 1b), tied by oval grids, front of cover also with "Paid Ap 7 1856" handstamp and "By Steamer via Halifax NS" manuscript (lower left), also with "St. John New Brunswick, MR 24, 1856" backstamp. At this time there was no 7-1/1d stamp.

(As a consequence of this rate, Canada issued the 7-1/2d postage stamp in 1857, see page 14). Mail from U.K. to the U. S. was charged at the prevailing rate of 1/- or 24 cents and letters were marked with the "American Packet" stamp at Portland (Maine).

1874:—The U.S.A. became a signatory to the Universal Postal Union and in 1875 a uniform basic rate of 5 cents (2-1/2d) between Great Britain and U.S.A. became effective. (Incidentally when the 1848 treaty expired the rate was reduced to 12¢ on January 1, 1868 and further reduced to 6¢ as of January 1, 1870.)

1878:—Canada became a member of the U.P.U. Rate of postage between Great Britain and Canada settled at 5 cents— (2-1/2d).

After the collapse of the Collins Line in 1858 the story becomes more involved but less romantic. In later years existing mail contracts either terminated or were revised. Many mail Steamers of different Lines were operating during the 1870s, and it seems the practise was to dispatch the mail by first steamer. A uniform rate of 2-1/2d was established between Great Britain and Canada—irrespective of the Steamship Line in 1878 when Canada became a member of the Universal Postal Union.

I have several covers showing both a 3d and 4d rate between Great Britain and Canada in the early 1870s but have as yet been unable to get sufficient information as to the reason why. Perhaps some reader will be able to provide the answer.

I have omitted all mention of the early U.S. Havre Line of Packets, and the fascinating story of the beginnings of the U.S. Lines to Germany, the forerunners of what eventually came to be the Hamburg American Co. and the North German Lloyd. The British G.P.O. were again very “awkward” in the 1850s in connection with the U.S.-Germany Mails, which resulted in the marking of mail “Prussian Closed Mail.” This was because the G.P.O. imposed the ship letter 8d rate to U.S.-Germany mails when the ships touched at Cowes or Southampton! All this is another story, and I prefer to limit myself to the telling, as far as I am able, of the very romantic story of the Transatlantic Mails between England and the North American Continent.

I think it fitting to mention here the controversy as to which country goes the credit of having the first steam vessel to cross the Atlantic. Most Americans claim the “Savannah”—and I have read of this claim in “Hunts Merchants Magazine” (New York), Vol. 3 1840. But reliable authorities maintain the “Savannah” did not make the whole crossing entirely under her own steam; it is said she lifted her paddles up half way across the Ocean and used her sails.

The Canadians maintain the honour goes to their ship “The Royal William” built in Quebec and certainly there is no disputing the fact she made the crossing entirely

under her own power in 1833. (This is the first time we have noted this claim made. Ed.)

But few know that the Dutch in 1827-28 and 29 made several trips by steamship “Curacao” from Antwerp to South America, so that actually the Dutch rightly claim the honour of the first Transatlantic crossing made entirely under steam.

Editor’s Note:

For the past ten years or so, Stanley B. Ashbrook has been making a very thorough and careful study of Trans-Atlantic Mails of the Period 1815 to 1870, in all its phases. We have had the privilege of seeing some of the work that he has done in this connection and we look forward to the time when it will be published in permanent book form for the benefit of philately. From some of his material, which is not as yet generally available, we have gleaned some interesting sidelights that help to clarify parts of Major Staff ’s story.

For example, in the period around 1845-48, the British Packet charge on a letter to America from Great Britain was a shilling, or approximately 24¢. By “Packet” was meant the Government Mail Contract which was with the British Cunard Line. When the American Steam Packets to England and France entered into the competition with the British in the late 1849s, the British authorities issued an order known as the (British) “P. O. Order of June 9th, 1847,” to the effect that on all mail brought into Great Britain one shilling per half ounce was to be charged, regardless of the nationality of the ship that carried the mail, in an effort to put this new American competition out of business. In other words, a letter carried by an American Packet was charged 24¢ postage in this country, but when it got to England an additional 24¢, or a shilling was charged, although the British P.O.D. had not performed any particular service. This resulted in the Retaliatory Act of 1848, which provided that the same postage be charged in this country as was charged by England. As a result the British signed a postal treaty in December 1848 that eliminated this unnecessary charge. In this same period

both the Collins Line and British Cunard Line (the Cunard contract was signed in 1839), secured substantial subsidies from their respective Governments, although it was natural that the amount paid the Collins Line was rather small as compared with the big compensation paid the Cunard Line by the British Government. We were therefore working under the same subsidies when the ten-year mail contract of the Collins Line with the United States Government expired in 1857 and Congress refused to renew same due to violent opposition on the part of Western Senators, and demanded that more money be allotted for Western mail routes, and less money for the big shipping interests. (It will be recalled that the Great Overland Mail contract went into effect in September of 1858.) As a result of the loss of this subsidy the Collins Line was unable to compete with the heavily subsidized British Line, and naturally they were forced into receivership.

One other item in Mr. Ashbrook's notes is also of interest, which refers to the "Prussian Closed Mail," which Major Staff mentions, but does not explain. This referred to mail from the United States to the German and Austrian States, which was sent from New York in sealed bags through England, and England was paid by the bulk weight rather than by the piece. A rate of 30¢ per half ounce was applied to such mail and it was marked "Via Prussian Closed Mail." This was in effect for quite a number of years.